FONDATION
DE L'INNOVATION
POUR LA DÉMOCRATIE

**Appel à communication pour le colloque**

**Substantive democracy, environment and duality in Indian Ocean islands**

***Antananarivo, Madagascar*** 3-5 Maís 2025

**Objective**

As part of the launch of its Indo-Oceanic branch, **the Innovation for Democracy Foundation** is organising an inter-regional conference from **3 to 5 March 2025** in **Antananarivo, Madagascar**, on the theme of **"Substantive democracy, environment and sustainability in Indian Ocean Islands"**.

## 1.Context

Since the introduction of a multi-party system in Africa in the 1990s, the notion of democracy has often been reduced to its electoral dimension alone. Focusing on electoral processes and the principle of alternating political regimes, this approach to the ways in which collective responsibilities and citizens' freedoms are exercised has given rise to numerous controversies and misunderstandings. In particular, it has helped to spread the idea that democracy is fundamentally a Western ideology, imported and imposed on African societies.

However, the multiple crises experienced by the dominant democratic model and observed both in countries described as "old democracies" and other so-called "new democracies", have made it difficult for us to understand how the democratic model works.
"These 'emerging' countries underline the need to rethink democracy. This reflection invites us, on the one hand, to go beyond the classic or neo-institutionalist paradigms promoted by international organisations and, on the other , to consider historical and contextualised approaches, which value in particular endogenous forms living together, genuinely participative ways of governing and the importance of the commons.

This inter-regional conference is part of this dynamic. In line with the Foundation's substantive democracy , it seeks to re-articulate democracy in Africa, taking into account the complexity of the socio-historical trajectories specific to African societies and the territorial and sociolinguistic specificities that characterise them. In this way, it brings into debate contemporary ecological and environmental issues, the problem of the 'commons' and questions about sustainability. All of this is deciphered through the prism of the challenges of substantive democracy in Indian Ocean region.

## 2. Issues for the conference

The conference will provide a regional forum for dialogue and the sharing of experience. It will provide an opportunity to reflect on the common challenges of consolidating democratic systems and improving the processes of sustainable governance of natural resources.

The conference is taking place in a regional and global context marked by multifaceted governance crises. For example, the islands of the Indian Ocean are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the degradation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and the over-exploitation of natural resources, the causes or aggravating factors of which are often associated with social inequalities, gender issues, injustices and demographic pressure. In most cases, these challenges are linked to dysfunctional systems of governance, citizen participation and democracy in general. The colloquium will encourage meetings and exchanges between the various players involved in democratic and environmental governance (researchers, citizens, political decision-makers, civil society organisations and other marginalised voices).

The governance of natural resources and the challenges of sustainability are intrinsically linked to the issue of substantive democracy. The conference will analyse these interrelations, taking into account the specific geographical and socio-political features of the Indian Ocean islands. Particular attention will be paid to the way in which socio-economic inequalities influence the management of natural resources and democratic processes. The question will also be raised as to what models can emerge from comparative experiences between the islands. The proposed approach will thus consist in identifying local solutions based on endogenous knowledge while taking a comparative regional perspective.

## 3. Themes of the conference

The conference has six main themes:

### 3.1. Social justice, environmental sustainability and intangible capital

The links between social justice and environmental sustainability are part of a dynamic in which social inequalities exacerbate tensions over the management natural resources. The principle of social justice is based primarily on a fair distribution of resources, but also on recognition of the rights of historically marginalised communities. In the Indian Ocean region, profound inequalities persist, reconciling social justice and sustainability requires participatory mechanisms, involving local communities in decisions ecosystem management. One aspect that is often overlooked in this dynamic is intangible capital, which encompasses traditional knowledge, cultural practices and social ties specific to each community. This intangible capital is an essential lever for strengthening people's resilience in the face of environmental challenges, while preserving their identity and values.

communities. Integrating this intangible capital into environmental management processes not only makes it possible to make the most of ancestral knowledge, but also to promote more inclusive and sustainable governance that respects the specific cultural characteristics of communities.

### 3.2. Decentralisation and development of rural areas

Decentralisation is often seen as a way of bringing decision-making closer to local realities, particularly in rural areas. Local knowledge needs to be integrated into governance to ensure the effectiveness of public policies in marginalised territories. In the context of local territories in the Indian Ocean, decentralisation can lead to better management of natural resources, provided that it is accompanied by effective transfers of skills and funding. Without a genuine commitment to inclusion, decentralisation risks reproducing inequalities.

### 3.3. Local knowledge, customary practices and inclusive governance

Local knowledge systems and customary practices play a central role in the sustainable governance of natural resources. In the Indian Ocean, customary agricultural practices or traditional methods of managing marine ecosystems can offer viable alternatives to the technocratic approaches often imposed by international frameworks. Inclusive governance should therefore not ignore local cultural realities and values.

### 3.4. Marine resources and global issues

The marine resources of the Indian Ocean islands are gradually being integrated into globalised economic networks, creating tensions between the economic exploitation of these resources and environmental protection. If marine resources are both local common goods and global strategic issues, then it is necessary to encourage dialogue between local and global levels to avoid marginalising coastal communities. These challenges are exacerbated by climate change, which is affecting coral reefs and marine ecosystems that are essential for fishing, the main sources of subsistence for millions of people.

### 3.5. Gender, climate and societies

Gender is a key issue in societal and environmental dynamics, particularly in the islands of the Indian Ocean, where women play a central role in agricultural activities, natural resource management and community practices. Kenyan activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai has demonstrated the extent which empowering women transforms societies and builds resilience in the face of socio- environmental challenges. In contexts such as Madagascar, where women often manage access to vital resources such as water and food, their role in local decision-making and resource governance is vital to promoting inclusive sustainability. A gender- based approach to environmental issues means that we can better understand and respond to the needs and specific characteristics of communities, while at the same time making the most of the knowledge and initiatives taken by women.

### 3.6. Inequalities and citizen mobilisation for sustainability

Economic and social inequalities are holding back citizen participation, which is essential if we are to build sustainable trajectories. Citizen mobilisation can transform governance systems into tools for social justice, provided it is based on strong alliances between civil society, researchers and public authorities. In Indian Ocean islands, citizens' movements, such as those linked to the defence of land or the preservation of forests, demonstrate the potential of collective mobilisation for environmental causes. These actions, inspired by African examples such as the youth climate movement in Kenya, show that the fight against inequality is inseparable from ecological sustainability.

## SUBMISSION CONDITIONS

Those interested in taking part in this conference are invited to submit their proposals in the form of an **abstract of 500 words maximum, line spacing 1text size 12**.

The paper proposal, in French or English, must include:

- **The title of the communication,**
- **The thematic focus of the proposed communication,**
- **The author(s) with their full name(s), email address and institutional affiliation,**

The interest of the subject, an identified problem, the hypothesis adopted and two or three key words.

When selecting candidates, priority will be given to proposals based on field surveys.

Successful candidates will be invited to take part in the conference.

**Submissions must reach the organisers by 31 January 2025 at the latest.**

*For greater fluidity and convenience, we advise you to complete the application form from a computer.*

**Fifth Floor, University Corner, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2050, South Africa**
**Tel: + 27 11 717 4220**
**Email: applications@innovationdemocratie.org**
**Website: www.innovationdemocratie.org**
**Linktr.ee: linktr.ee/IDFoundation**